

## Judge brings courtroom to Richland school

By Sara Schilling, Herald staff writer



Kai-Huei Yau/Herald - Jerri Potts, second from right, court commissioner for Benton and Franklin counties, leads a Street Law round-table discussion Wednesday at River's Edge High School in Richland as Emily Charboneau, 18, of Richland, talks about the legal entanglements involved in her hypothetical relationship with classmate Nick Martens, 19, of Richland, as Jarred McCary, 18, left, of West Richland, listens in. The unit takes place in a contemporary world problems course at River's Edge, which is team taught by Jackie Ives, right, and Denise Rosenblum, and explores real-world applications of the law.

**RICHLAND** — Becca Coronado's homework assignment for the law class she's taking at River's Edge High School wasn't to read about protection orders -- it was to fill one out.

And the 18-year-old didn't have a teacher or a tutor helping her -- she had a judge.

That's because Coronado is part of the Richland school's Street Law class, which aims to teach students about the legal system. The program is used in schools nationwide.

At River's Edge, it's taught by Jerri Potts, a court commissioner for Benton-Franklin Superior Court. No other Tri-City schools have the program.

"I've already learned a lot," Coronado said during a break last week. "It's cool."

Potts worked with River's Edge teachers Denise Rosenblum and Jackie Ives to bring the course to the school this year. They'd gotten to know each other through the civics education program, "We the People."

Rosenblum and Ives felt Street Law would fit well into their Contemporary World Problems class.

"It brings the law to them and helps them understand the world," Rosenblum said.

Potts visits the school weekly to teach students about everything from torts to juvenile justice.

She spent time last week helping them with homework assignments. Students were given fictitious scenarios -- from a dispute over child custody to a military wife who needed to help her husband draft a will -- and had to figure out what to do.

In Coronado's scenario, she needed a court order to protect her from an abusive boyfriend.

"Do you know where you'd go to get it?" Potts asked.

Coronado wasn't sure. The judge told her she'd go to the clerk's office at the county courthouse.

That kind of practical information is at the heart of Street Law, which was started in the early 1970s by law students at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. In this state, it's taught by judges like Potts.

The program encourages students to be active citizens, said Margaret Fisher, one of the founders, who now oversees the program in Washington. It also allows them "to build a relationship with someone who's a powerful figure in the community, a judge," she said.

That appears to be happening at River's Edge. Potts knows all the students by name, and in between their legal discussions last week, they asked her questions about what it's like on the bench.

"(The class) is awesome. We learn stuff we can use in everyday life. It's definitely something young people can use," said Kevin Ashley, 18.

Potts also arranges for people working in law enforcement and the legal community to visit the class, and a courtroom field trip will be scheduled so the teens can see her in action.

By the course's end, Potts hopes students will understand the legal system and be familiar with their rights. But that's not all.

"It's not only about their rights," she said. "It's also about their responsibilities as citizens."

Read more: <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2010/03/22/948168/judge-brings-courtroom-to-the.html#ixzz0ivoVxruw>